



Alaska Department of Natural Resources

Division of Forestry



Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Division of Wildlife

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Large Prescribed Burn Planned for Tanana Flats

State officials hope this will be the year to conduct a 74,000 acre prescribed fire on the Tanana Flats.

Department of Fish and Game studies indicate that poor habitat is already having an effect on the moose on the flats. Cow moose are having their first calves at an older age, producing smaller calves, and giving birth to fewer twins. "We are worried that moose numbers will decline if nothing is done to improve the habitat," said Don Young, Area Biologist for the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

Game Management Unit 20A, which includes the Tanana Flats, is an Intensive Management Area under legislation passed in 1994. The prescribed burn is designed to improve habitat for the large numbers of moose that use the flats.

The burn has been approved for 10 years, waiting for the right mix of weather conditions and availability of fire fighters to get the job done. The planned burn site is located between the Wood River and Tatlanika Creek, and just north of the foothills of the Alaska Range. This is about 30 miles southwest of Fairbanks, 20 miles southeast of Nenana, and 9 miles from Gold King.

The prescribed burn is also designed to remove large expanses of black spruce that currently pose a fire threat to private property near Gold King and the Wood River. Prescribed burning allows managers to reduce the hazard under safe conditions.

"We would much rather burn when conditions are in our favor than end up fighting a lightning-caused fire under the worst possible conditions," said Robert Schmoll, Fire Management Officer for the State Division of Forestry. "It would be a costly proposition to try to keep a fire out of Gold King if it starts in all this black spruce when the weather is hot and dry."

The burn area is far enough away from most residential areas that it will pose little threat to people or their property. "We are more concerned about smoke from the fire than the fire itself," said Schmoll. "Despite its large size, this is a pretty safe burn to pull off."

The Tanana River and areas previously burned in 2001 lie between the planned burn and most inhabited areas. A wide fuel break was constructed along the southern boundary in March 2004, where the black spruce is thickest. Fire lines were also constructed around Native allotments nearest the northern end of the burn area. Fire managers will take extra precautions to protect these allotments and private property near Gold King and along the Wood River.

Fire officials will conduct the burn in a way that will reduce the likelihood of smoke being a problem, but they can't promise that smoke will not get into the Fairbanks area. Aerial firing will be used to ignite the area quickly to get most of the burn over within a day or two, and to produce a high smoke column so smoke will be carried away from nearby populated areas.

"We recognize the potential for smoke impacts from the burn and avoiding those is a high priority," said Dale Haggstrom, Fire and Habitat Management Coordinator for the Department of Fish and Game. "We will do everything possible to conduct this burn in a way that smoke will not affect people's health or local businesses."

Fire officials plan to coordinate with the Department of Environmental Conservation to monitor smoke conditions after the fire is lit. "If, for any reason, it looks like smoke will end up in populated areas, we will ask the local media to help us let people know," said Haggstrom. "If that happens, those most sensitive to smoke should take the usual precautions including staying indoors, moving to smoke free shelters, or contacting their doctors."

Conditions suitable for conducting the burn are most likely to occur after the Fourth of July weekend through August.

For further information contact the Fairbanks Fish and Game (459-7231) or Forestry (451-2636) offices. Additionally, the burn plan can be obtained from the Division of Wildlife website at <http://wildlife.alaska.gov/management/planning/plan.cfm> or either agency's Fairbanks office. Air quality advisories and information on how you can protect yourself from the health effects of smoke are available from the Department of Environmental Conservation website at <http://www.dec.state.ak.us/air/smokemain.htm>.

